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COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO STALIN PURGE

CPUSA AND CPGB RANK AND FILE CRITICISMS
REVEAL IMPACT ON DISCIPLINE

1. The New York Daily Worker, and to a lesser extent, The London Daily Worker, have been publishing letters from readers which show that the 20th CPSU Congress Line is having a profoundly disruptive effect upon the traditional "iron" discipline of the Communist Parties in these two countries.
2. This estimate is based upon the following assumptions:
 - a. That the letters are authentic products of Communist Party members and sympathizers and are not "plants" (by the Party itself) or provocational products of anti-Communists;
 - b. That, to a varying degree, the reactions of the American and British Communists, as revealed by these letters, are paralleled in every other country where there is a strong tradition of democracy and of individual liberty.
3. Concerning the second assumption, it is true that only the American and British Communist press appears to have thrown open its pages to full-scale discussion. Nevertheless, we have evidence that the 20th Congress Line has had a profound impact upon many CP leaders and Party members in other Western countries. We do not know the details about the specific questions being raised to the same extent as we can observe them in the U. S. and Britain, but we do have sufficient information to know that a substantial ferment exists in such CPs as the Italian and Dutch. In Italy, internal disagreement has spilled out into the open (e.g., the Terracini affair). It is therefore justified to suggest that the questions raised by CPUSA and CPGB could be utilized for harassment purposes in other countries.
4. The most significant questions so far observed are these:
 - a. How valid is Marxist-Leninist theory if it can be so extensively perverted in practice as shown by the Stalin revelations?
 - b. How can this contradiction be rationalized for the benefit of the potential allies of the Communist united front drive?
 - c. Does the Leninist principle of authoritarianism (democratic centralism) within the CP still hold true?
 - d. To what extent can Marxism-Leninism be modified to fit local conditions without destroying its essential content (i.e., the problem of the "different roads to socialism")?

e. In the current readjustment, how far can criticism and free thought be permitted to go before ideological and organizational discipline is seriously endangered?

5. These questions are being raised in different forms in the letters to the Daily Worker, and in most cases, the writers do not appear to be fully aware of the implications of their remarks. In particular, they seem to be completely unaware of the fact that some of the questions imply a denial of the validity of Marxism. The letters (and they are in the minority) which show anxiety for the reputation of Stalin and for the sanctity of specific aspects of Leninist-Stalinist theory and practice, are probably expressions of fear that the whole Communist system is in jeopardy in the atmosphere of wide-ranging re-evaluation which currently (if temporarily) exists.

6. The Contradiction of Theory versus Practice

Many contributors have sought to excuse the evil practices of the Stalinist regime on the grounds that they were necessary under the circumstances. Others, seeking to avoid this implicit denial of principle, have said that the Stalinist practices cannot be justified, whatever the circumstances, but they are obviously troubled by the fact that such practices could occur under "socialism" which theoretically, by abolishing class conflicts of interest, would remove all possibility for such practices.

One contributor (New York Daily Worker, 24 April) brings this contradiction sharply into focus:

- a. The current exposure of past errors is developing its own set of cliches: "Alongside . . . such stalwarts as 'developing crisis', and 'Wall Street imperialists' we now have 'cult of the individual' and 'Beria gang', all of which gets as meaningful as soap commercials when used as a substitute for thought."
- b. The Soviet Union was the first state in history to test the Communist principle of scientific analysis of social development.
- c. "Now if errors are uncovered, if crimes against the people are committed, if anti-socialist ethics and morality crept in, elements of the theory, the practice, or both were wrong." (Underlining supplied.)
- d. "From the facts available, it seems that . . . it went along under the (by now) grisly slogan, 'the end justifies the means.'"

This writer holds that circumstances justified Soviet practices for a certain (unspecified) period, but he points out that theory (i.e., the "scientific analysis") was frozen for thirty years:

". . . The fear of counter-revolution . . . was apparently analyzed in 1950 the same way as it was in 1920."

The reason for this breakdown in the Marxist-Leninist doctrinal process -- that there "was no good yardstick to measure the development of socialist theory and practice in the USSR during this period" -- is merely an application of the new theory that the "capitalist encirclement" has been destroyed. What is significant is that the writer even questions the validity of Communist theory.

7. Rationalizing this contradiction for the benefit of potential allies.

The general line, as expressed by CP leaders, is that the organizational device of "collective leadership", plus other administrative curbs built into the machinery of the Communist State, plus the new balance of social and state forces, etc., can effectively prevent a recurrence of the sins of the Stalin era (divorce of theory from practice).

Contributors to the Daily Worker are discussing this problem from such more specific points of view as -- (a) the guarantee of the right of dissent under Communist rule; (b) organizational devices (unspecified) to maintain this right; (c) guarantees that art, science, and other cultural fields will not be subjected to Party dictation.

A contributor to the New York Daily Worker (24 April) exposes the Communist motives in this question, as well as the basic dilemma for Communist rule:

"How do we go about persuading America [i.e., potential allies] that we shall know how to distinguish between dissent and attempt at overthrow by violence?"

This writer fears that any attempt to argue that the right of non-violent dissent would be preserved, even for pro-capitalists, will only be disbelieved by Americans.

However, ranking CP leaders in both the U. S. and Britain have adopted the position that full freedoms, even the right to advocate a return to capitalism, will exist under Communist rule.

An article by Milton Howard in The New York Daily Worker (1 April) says that "one-party government was never a principle of Marxism" and that anti-Communist parties can safely be tolerated in a "socialist" regime. The assistant editor of The London Daily Worker, Mick Bennett, says that the Tory Party would be "free to conduct its work" under Communist rule, and that the Tory Party would undoubtedly wither away under the superior attractions of "socialism".

Such sophistries are obvious bait for non-Communists, and at this time, we feel that those who express them know that they would never be implemented. Nevertheless, the rank and file Party members may accept

them as genuine intentions, and even CP leaders may gradually absorb some of these ideas into their basic psychology. In the long run, it could lead to a softening of the Communist ideological armor.

8. Question of Democratic Centralism

A contributor, "R. B." (30 April) to the New York Daily Worker directly challenges the concept of democratic centralism and one-party government, suggesting that they "inevitably" breed bureaucratism. Under such a principle, he points out that only those who hold power can correct their own errors.

A contributor, R. Cocker (29 March) to the London Daily Worker asks: "Is it that the Party system of 'Democratic Centralism' is useful and necessary only for certain stages and conditions?"

This question, which questions the Leninist concept of Party discipline, also implicitly questions the Leninist scheme of the Party as the "vanguard".

The de-Stalinization drive, in particular, has led to extensive criticism in the letters to the Daily Worker (s) of the existing leadership and of the record of both the CPUSA and CPGB for suppressing intra-Party disagreement, for past purges, etc. This weakening of discipline will be discussed further below.

9. Modification of Marxism-Leninism

The 20th Congress line on "different roads to socialism" has provoked some discussion (e.g., in terms of the right to dissent, as above; the question of "peaceful transition" and the utilization of existing parliamentary institutions), but the most interesting letter is that of "R. B." in the New York Daily Worker of 30 April.

This letter (which has already been cited above) suggests that a future "socialist" regime in the United States should incorporate "the ancient idea . . . of a government of checks and balances." This startling (for a Communist) idea is followed by the proposal to completely overhaul the Party which would lead the way to "socialism" and govern the country thereafter:

"It is possible to make enough mistakes to exhaust the potentialities of an organization. But the organization, in the last analysis, is not of primary importance. It is the object of the organization that is important."

The American people, "R. B." believes, simply will not support the CP as it has existed. Therefore, he advocates that --

"a new American Marxist Party be founded, a fresh start made, a new foundation layed for a democratic socialist movement more solidly grounded in American traditions and methods."

Such propositions are radical departures from traditional Leninism and are implicitly anti-Marxist (i.e., in their advocacy of traditions based on idealism, rather than materialism).

(It is significant that the proposal to set up a new kind of proletarian party is similar to reports received to the effect that Khrushchev told French and Italian Communist leaders last year that such a reorganization was in store for those two countries.)

10. Impact of the current questioning on Party organizational discipline.

Just as the CPSU has experienced a certain weakening of discipline and excess of criticism as a consequence of the de-Stalinization drive, so the same result is observable in the letters to the New York and London Daily Worker(s).

Following a period (roughly until the week-end of 17-18 March, when authoritative news got out concerning the extent of the attacks upon Stalin) when the writers were relatively cautious and when most of the strong defenses of Stalin were printed, the correspondents to these two papers have largely expressed extreme enthusiasm for the new freedom which has been accorded them.

Some aspects of organizational and **ideological** discipline, as it is affected by the current rash of questioning and criticism have already been discussed above (e.g., democratic centralism, the dilemma of power in the Communist-run state).

In specific terms, the questions of international discipline and of discipline within the national CP are being raised along these lines:

- a. The Party leadership is being criticized for concealing the sins of the Stalin era, for complete subservience to all twists and turns in the Soviet line (including foreign policy and cultural diktat), and for suppressing all internal disagreement;
- b. There is disagreement among writers in the New York Daily Worker over whether American Communists have the right to openly criticize the CPSU and other CPs;
- c. There is also a lively discussion of the question of the responsibility of the present Soviet leaders for the maintenance of the Stalin dictatorship and for the sins it committed.

A fear for the safety of Party discipline was observable in the London Daily Worker, which attempted for a week to discontinue the

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discussion of Stalin's errors and merits. The New York Daily Worker has continued right along to publish sharply critical letters and its editors have encouraged this in their own articles.

Examples of criticism in the New York Daily Worker include such items as these:

- a. A large number of contributors have remarked upon the fact that for the first time, their dissenting opinions are being printed; most of these have attacked the readers' column in the past for its "dull uniformity" in plugging the prescribed line.
- b. "Boston Stitcher" (13 April) says that "often through no fault of their own, people not ideologically equipped nor through experience [sic], have found themselves in positions of leadership, so we have our little bureaucrats, too."
- c. Contributor (24 April) criticizes Party leaders being given more space in the press than the rank and file; calls upon them to "listen".
- d. Contributor (26 April) criticizes a leader (James Allen) for fearing that the open discussion "'can turn into a destructive flood"; declares it "nonsensical" that the U. S. Communists must stifle criticism of the USSR.
- e. "C.D." (18 April) objects to articles by the CPUSA's National Education Director on the question of "peaceful transition." Such articles indicate a basic change in the Party line, "C. D." says, and should have been subjected to a full-scale inner-Party discussion, instead of being laid down by leaders who "arrogate to themselves alone a change" in the Party line.

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